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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: CHATROOM CREDIBILITY, CLASS CHOICES

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat room "Sablat al-Arab" -- or simply "Al-Sablah" -- is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, Al-Sablah nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Call To Publish Al-Sablah Topics In Omani Newspapers
-- Criticizing The New Educational System

End summary.

Al-Sablah In The News

2. With the continued growth of Al-Sablah, including most recently the addition of regular contributions from two banned Omani journalists, there is a growing sentiment among members that the forum is gaining credibility and becoming a potential news source. One member proposed that the forum discussions -- specifically those relating to politics, economics, and social issues -- should be published in local Omani newspapers. Several contributors embraced this idea. One member noted, "Some of the newspapers already deal with the issues we discuss in the forum. However, the issues are dealt with superficially and are often poorly reported." Another offered, "Once we establish a free press in Oman, this kind of reporting could happen." Other more skeptical members wrote, "Though we support this idea, we know that it is virtually impossible for the government to grant people, especially non-journalists, the right to put forward their thoughts in the news media, particularly if these thoughts/sentiments go against the Sultan and the Majlis." The discussion concluded with the following comment: "The newspapers published in Oman do not belong to the Omanis. We think they actually belong to other countries, because these newspapers do not discuss the needs, demands, or problems of the Omani people! It appears they would rather get news topics from other places in the world, instead of looking internally."

Change Isn't Always Good

3. Another topic that generated a large number of responses was the creation of a new educational system for Omani high schools, under which students choose certain subjects to prepare for higher education, rather than follow a predetermined curriculum. Initially introduced as a pilot program in a few select schools, it is now being implemented nationally. Al-Sablah members criticized the new system, with one writer stating, "This new system is confusing for people who were brought up through the old system. This system hasn't been fully reviewed, and they are already imposing it on the students, less than a year after the last curriculum change." Another contributor responded, "The teachers and school administrators were not properly trained for such a sweeping change to occur so suddenly. Now the students have no real resource with which to clarify any doubts or questions they may have about the new system." One Sablah member, who also happened to be a student affected by the change, wrote, "We do not see the benefits of the new system to students. How does it really help us when it comes time for us to prepare for entrance into higher education?" A respondent summed up the general feeling of forum members by observing, "This system is even faultier than the previous one. What is the Ministry of Education doing to Oman?"

BALTIMORE